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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/SPG AND DRL/IRF

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [SCUL](#) [SU](#)  
SUBJECT: SUDAN'S ANGLICANS STRUGGLE WITH A CHANGING CHURCH

REF: KHARTOUM 545

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Andrew Steinfeld; Reason: 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Episcopal Church of Sudan (ECS), a province of the Anglican Communion, has gone from being the church of the colonial establishment to a church of the poor and displaced. The Church estimates it has 5 million adherents, mostly in the South, though many of its struggles occur in the North, where Government restrictions and confiscations have crippled its capacity to serve its flock. It is also prone to division -- and even Government intrigue -- and may soon face a leadership crisis. Like Sudan, the Church's future is far from clear. This is the first in a series of reports on religious groups in Sudan, and the challenges they face in the future. END SUMMARY.

From Church of the Elite to Church of the IDP  
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12. (C) All Saints' Episcopal Cathedral, Khartoum, offers Sunday services in no less than five languages: Moro, Zande, Nuer, Arabic, and English. Holy Communion in English, at 8:30 am, remains one of the most sparsely attended, with only a handful of self-reserved Englishmen and a few more effusive Southern Sudanese -- a trend that illustrates the changing nature of the Episcopal Church of Sudan. Anglicanism came to Khartoum in 1899 with Lord Kitchener and the British Army, but it took firm hold in the South, where it was favored by colonial authorities. Even after independence, the Diocese of Sudan remained under the direct supervision of the Archbishop of Canterbury until 1976, when the Episcopal Church of Sudan (ECS) was established as a separate province within the Anglican Communion. Then, as now, the Church continues to struggle with the question of its identity, or how to be a Church that is English in tradition but Sudanese in governance.

13. (C) Church officials freely admit they don't know how many Anglicans there are in Sudan. "Maybe 5 million?" guessed The Rt. Rev. Ezekiel Kondo, ECS Bishop of Khartoum. (If Kondo's guess is correct, over 12 percent of Sudan's estimated 40 million people are Anglican -- a higher percentage than in the United States.) The Church is currently divided into 24 dioceses, 20 of which are in the South; church headquarters are also in the South, in Juba, under the leadership of The Most Rev. Joseph Marona, Archbishop of Sudan. "Juba is like our Canterbury," Kondo joked. Ties with Anglican churches in the United States and Britain are strong, with frequent missions and exchanges -- including a pastoral visit by the Archbishop of Canterbury in February (reftel). The Church's presence in Northern Sudan, however, is limited. By his own estimate, Kondo's flock includes over a million people spread out from the Chadian border to the Red Sea, though most are clustered along the Nile, especially in Khartoum. Most are displaced Southerners, though not necessarily IDPs; Kondo

himself, for example, was born in the Nuba Mountains, but moved to Khartoum over forty years ago for school.

#### Building New Churches, Redeeming Old Ones

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¶4. (C) Sheltering this flock continues to be the major problem for the ECS, especially in the North. Its sole church in Greater Khartoum -- the Cathedral -- is located in the city center, but most parishioners live on the fringes, especially at the Soba-Aradi and Mayo-Madela IDP camps. "It takes them hours to get here, but many do come, even if they have to work on Sunday," Kondo explained. The ECS would like to establish new parishes closer to the faithful, but building a church requires a permit from the Ministry of Guidance and Endowments, approval by the Ministry of Planning and Engineering, and permission from local authorities -- something Kondo says has not happened in over thirty years. Instead, IDPs often build their own chapels at the camps, only to have them condemned as illegal structures. The irony, as Kondo notes, is that the Cathedral could never hold all the faithful if they decided to come en masse into the city and worship, but the distance means the Cathedral always seems half-empty. "The Government just says 'You can't fill up what you have, so you don't need a new church.'"

¶5. (C) Establishing new churches, though, is just part of the problem, because the ECS has lost a significant portion of its property over the past thirty years. In 1971, the Government confiscated the original cathedral in Khartoum -- built in 1912 as a memorial to General Gordon -- because it was "too close" to the Republican Palace; as compensation, it gave the ECS land and money for the new cathedral, though hardly enough to complete construction. (The new cathedral

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remains unfinished, while the old is now a museum -- complete with its original stained glass windows, rood screen, and pipe organ). In the early 1980s, the Government seized St. Catherine's Hospital, in Omdurman, though it has since returned it to the ECS; it also tore down a church in Renk to make way for a road, though the Archbishop of Canterbury dedicated a replacement during his recent visit (reftel). Most recently, Gabriel Roric Jur, a renegade ECS bishop -- and former State Minister of Foreign Affairs -- signed over title to the ECS Guest House, including the Church's Khartoum offices, to the Government in 2004. "We have protested, fasted, prayed, and gone to court to get it back," said Kondo, "but I don't know if it will ever happen."

#### Divided Shepherds, Divided Flocks

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¶6. (C) The split between Roric and the ECS underlines another challenge for the Church's future. From 1992 to 1998, the ECS was divided by a power struggle between two candidates for the archbishopric; the rift was healed only after the Archbishop of Canterbury intervened. The ECS' General Synod elected Marona Archbishop in 2000, but his attempts to impose greater discipline on individual bishops backfired in 2003, when he required all bishops to live in their dioceses. Roric -- the Bishop of Rumbek -- refused to comply with the order, to keep his residence and Foreign Ministry job in Khartoum. Marona then removed him from office, prompting Roric to establish "The Reformed Episcopal Church of Sudan." (Roric, for his part, says the dispute is theological: Marona and the ECS accept homosexuality, and take "gay money" from the United States, while Roric condemns it.) The dispute has led some ECS officials to believe the Government is backing Roric, in an effort to undermine the Church. "Of course the NCP is giving Roric money -- he couldn't survive without it!" Kondo laughed. Though Roric does not seem to have attracted much of a following, he still poses a threat to the future of the ECS -- especially now that Marona, aged 65, is sick with malaria, and was unable to accompany the Archbishop of Canterbury's for his entire visit to the

country.

17. (C) Kondo -- at age 49, a quick riser in the ECS hierarchy -- may be a possible successor to Marona. But Kondo is less than optimistic about the future of the Church, or of Sudan. "The CPA talks about religious freedom, but where is it?" he asked, pointing to his dilapidated office, which the Government recently returned to Church hands. "The NCP is giving us some freedom because they are being forced to, not because they want to," Kondo explained. Government efforts to reach out to Christians have been limited -- non-Muslims in Khartoum are still subject to Sharia law -- and the quasi-official Sudan Inter-religious Council (SIRC) has yet to make any progress getting permits for new churches, or returning confiscated property to the ECS. "The SPLM has been tricked -- it's like your neighbor invites you to stay at his house for the night, but then turns out the lights and you don't know how get out."

Comment: Were Goes the Church?

18. (C) Despite Kondo's pessimism about the CPA, his analysis also reflects a small measure of progress. Only five years ago, on April 11, 2001, riot police stormed All Saints' Cathedral -- killing one, injuring seven, and arresting 54 others -- to quash protests after the Government cancelled a large Easter prayer rally. This type of violent coercion now seems to be a thing of the past. But a change in Government tactics will not solve all the Church's problems. The Episcopal Church of Sudan is still in transition from being the established church of a small colonial elite to being a grassroots church of the poor and marginalized. Its identity hinges on its history, and the legacy left it by the British -- a legacy that has not only made Church property a prime target for successive regimes, but also forced the ECS to re-think its very identity. Its decentralized structure -- another Anglican legacy -- has made this process harder, and more open to divisions between rival clerics. Worse, it also made the Church weaker, and more open to manipulation by the Government. Whatever path Sudan takes, the future of its Episcopal Church seems even less certain.

STEINFELD